



Afghan Army chief returns from US with new ideas

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Mason T. Lowery
OSC-A Public Affairs

KABUL, Afghanistan – The chief of the Afghan National Army's General Staff recently returned from a tour of the United States where he visited three U.S. Army posts to learn U.S. Army training techniques and experience American culture.

Gen. Bismullah Khan returned to Afghanistan on Oct. 22 certain of the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan. He said he was impressed with the professionalism of U.S. Army training, particularly the role of the noncommissioned officer, and returned with new ideas on how to train a professional army and a greater appreciation for the American way of life.

"It was an extremely educational visit. We learned a lot about U.S. military facilities and methods of training," he said.

Khan brought three key members of his staff with him on the trip, Maj. Gen. Abdul "Habibi" Abdullah, chief of personnel; Brig. Gen. Aminullah Karim, operations deputy director in training and education; and Lt. Col. Mohammad Farid, training and operations director.

"We highlighted to ANA senior leadership time-tested and proven methods of training Soldiers, empowering NCOs and developing leaders," said Army Lt. Col. John T. Hansen, Office of Security Cooperation – Afghanistan's Air Division chief and Khan's escort during the trip. He added that the impact of the trip on the ANA is qualitative rather than quantitative. "It's more of a mindset – thoughts



Photo by Army Lt. Col. John T. Hansen

Army Brig. Gen. James Yarbrough, deputy commanding general of Fort Benning, introduces Gen. Bismullah Khan and members of the Afghan National Army's General Staff to a platoon of basic training Soldiers.

and ideas, which are the start of any meaningful process."

The Afghan delegation began their visit at Fort Drum, near Watertown, N.Y. While there, they observed training and established relationships with leaders and staff members of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, which is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom early next year.

Khan addressed the leaders and Soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division, explaining the operational environment of the conflict and how the Coalition effort is helping Afghanistan. "Islam is not a culture of terror," he stated. "Afghans now have no fear of external threats, thanks to the U.S. and Coalition."

From Fort Drum, the delegation traveled south to Fort Benning, near

Columbus, Ga. While at the "Home of the Infantry," Khan observed Soldiers training at Ranger School and Basic Combat Training as well as those conducting training at the Non-commissioned Officer Academy and Officer Candidate School.

"The most significant thing we showed them was the impact of an empowered noncommissioned officer corps. The Soviet system, by which previous Afghan military formations were modeled, marginalized NCOs. We demonstrated the powerful impact of NCOs bestowed with authority, responsibility, and autonomy by visiting the Primary Leadership Development Course and other NCO-owned and operated organizations and events," Hansen said. "We hope to help them empower their own NCO Corps (in Afghanistan)."

The delegation viewed hands-on training at Fort Benning and observed U.S. Soldiers conduct training on military operations in urban terrain. They saw NCOs leading the training, based on guidance they received from officers.

At the Officer Candidate School, Karim asked Army Brig. Gen. James Yarbrough, deputy commanding general of Fort Benning, why college graduates join the Army. Yarbrough told him, "They just have a desire to serve their country."

The final leg of Khan's American journey took him to Fort McPherson, near Atlanta, to meet with leaders from the U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army

Forces Central Command. There they discussed future security cooperation objectives for Afghanistan.

In addition to gaining invaluable insight about how the U.S. Army conducts its training, Khan and his staff also experienced a bit of American culture during their stay. Several short excursions to local neighborhoods and businesses familiarized the Afghan staff officers with the characteristics of American society.

When Khan and the delegation returned to Afghanistan, they were able to reflect on what they learned. "It was a perfect combination of visiting military installations and visiting with Americans and seeing

different cultural sites," Khan said.

Hansen said the U.S. Army benefited from the trip as well. "The visit demonstrated to U.S. operational commanders, training base leaders and our Soldiers the commitment of Afghanistan to developing a national army with competent leadership." He noted that the trip also had a positive impact on basic trainees. Seeing the Afghan leaders brought home the reason for their training, he said.


"The delegation gained valuable insight from the trip. They are looking forward to implementing many new ideas and techniques as they improve their own training base in Afghanistan," Hansen said. 



Photo Army Lt. Col. John T. Hansen

(from left to right) Afghan National Army Maj. Gen. Abdul "Habibi" Abdullah, chief of personnel; Gen. Bismullah Khan, chief of the ANA's General Staff; ANA Brig. Gen. Aminullah Karim, operations deputy director in training and education; and ANA Lt. Col. Mohammad Farid, training and operations director; enjoy a beautiful day in downtown Atlanta on their way to "the Underground" shopping mall for lunch and shopping.